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ABSTRACT

In 1968, a task force was appointed, by the National Planning Conference on the Feasibility of a Uniform Crediting and Certification System for Continuing Education, to study the feasibility of a uniform unit of measurement of noncredit continuing education programs which could be used by noncollegiate and collegiate institutions and continuing education activities to meet current needs. The Continuing Education Unit (CEU) was defined by the task force: ten contact hours of participation in an organized continuing education experience under responsible sponsorship, capable direction, and qualified instruction. The Southern Association of Schools and Colleges officially adopted the CEU in its revised Standard Nine for continuing education activities. The adoption of the CEU is becoming increasingly widespread. The National University Extension Association, in addition to being one of the sponsors of the conference cited, is concerned with the issues concerning the CEU: the quality control of noncredit activities and the need for an accrediting association, the institutional arrangement for accrediting, and the financing of CEU-related activities. (AG)

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THE IMMINENT NATIONAL IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CEU

This is the first issue in a new information service for the institutional members of NUEA. In this series, each special report will attempt to explore a subject of immediate and vital concern to the membership in greater depth than is possible in the NUEA Newsletter. In general, the reports will be oriented toward the needs and interest of extension and continuing education administrators.

We welcome your comments about this service and your suggestions for future topics.

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The continuing education unit had its beginning on March 15, 1968, when William Turner and Paul Grogan asked the NUEA Board of Directors to appoint a "joint committee with industry, government agencies and professional associations" to study "(1) the definition of a unit of extension credit or other academic currency, and (2) the development of criteria and formats by which these credits could be earned." On July 1-2 of that year, a National Planning Conference on the Feasibility of a Uniform Crediting and Certification System for Continuing Education cosponsored by the U.S. Office of Education, U.S. Civil Service Commission, American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers and NUEA was held in Washington, D.C. It was attended by 33 national associations from education, government, business, labor and the professions.

After two days of discussions, the participants agreed to appoint a "task force to study the feasibility of a uniform unit of measurement of noncredit continuing education programs which could be used by all groups to meet current needs." From the beginning, NUEA's stated purpose and the organizing group's purpose was to cover noncollegiate as well as collegiate institutions and continuing education activities.

After two years of study and deliberations, the task force issued an interim statement on October 20, 1970, in which a continuing education unit was first defined as "ten contact hours of participation in an organized continuing education experience under responsible sponsorship, capable direction, and qualified instruction." More than 12,000 copies of that brochure have been distributed nationally by William Turner, chairman of the task force and NUEA's Washington Office.

Since that time, a pilot study was conducted by NUEA for the task force and, most significantly, the Southern Association of Schools and Colleges officially

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adopted the CEU in its revised Standard 9 for continuing education activities. The CEU is now in process of implementation throughout the Southern Association and guidelines have just been published by the association for its member institutions.

The CEU is being widely adopted by institutions of higher education, professional associations, and various types of private organizations. As interest has built up, the Task Force on the Continuing Education Unit (renamed) took five actions at its recent meeting in July which are likely to have decisive impact on the national implementation of the CEU. It agreed 1) to prepare national guidelines for distribution by early next year, 2) to copyright the guidelines and use a registered trademark to protect the use of the CEU; 3) to appoint a special committee to explore alternative ways of financing distribution of the handbook and use of the trademark; 4) to ask NUEA to consider submission of a proposal on how it would organize a takeover of the work of the task force once the guidelines were approved; and 5) to review the guidelines with the 33 national associations which originally set up the task force.

These actions together with indications that the Federation of Regional Accrediting Commissions of Higher Education (FRACHE) may complete action on the national adoption of the CEU by this fall or winter, bring the CEU to the brink of becoming a significant new development nationally in the broad field of post-secondary education.

THE ISSUES FOR NUEA

1. Quality Control of Noncredit Activities

The implications for NUEA are as deep and pervasive as almost any action in its entire history. The Executive Committee of the Board of Directors, which was called to a special meeting last month by President Goerke to discuss the task force's requests prior to the full Board of Directors meeting next month, took two actions after extensive discussion. First, it agreed to recommend to the Board that NUEA copyright the guidelines and register the CEU trademark on behalf of the National Task Force. Second, it agreed to recommend to the Board that NUEA propose to the task force that a subsidiary corporation of NUEA be set up to develop an accrediting system for noncredit continuing education programs which desired to award CEUs. A draft of the proposal, which is being prepared by the Washington Office, will call for a governing Board of Directors of 20-30 persons, half from higher education associations, one-fourth from professional associations and one-fourth from business, labor and governmental agencies. For accrediting purposes, the proposal calls for five divisions to be set up to cover the major types of institutions which would be eligible to award CEUs: collegiate, governmental, business, labor and professional and occupational.

There are two reasons why the Executive Committee is proposing an accrediting association instead of the trademark as a quality control instrument on the use of the CEU. It is apparent that authority to use the trademark would, in effect, require that guidelines and standards similar to those used in accrediting systems be applied to institutions which sought to use the CEU. And it is also apparent that there is no body of law or experience in the use of trademarks for approval of educational programs but much experience and some significant legal precedents on the operation of accrediting systems.

2. Institutional Arrangement for Accrediting

In a real sense the effort to develop a uniform unit of measurement for continuing education activities is precedent-shattering in that it brings under one roof activities in collegiate and noncollegiate institutions. Some of the programs in these institutions are competitive. Should they be given equal status through the use of the CEU?

From the beginning of the CEU effort, noncollegiate groups have been involved in every aspect of planning and development. It was evident that employers, professional groups, data collection agencies and other noncollegiate consumers of collegiate continuing education activities were the intended beneficiaries of the "uniform unit of measurement."

As we near the end of the trail, however, the fact that noncollegiate organizations are also important producers of noncredit continuing education, sometimes on a competitive basis, has begun to raise anxieties on the part of some collegiate administrators about the prospect of legitimizing competing noncollegiate programs through a single accrediting instrument which covers continuing education activities of all types of producer institutions.

The proponents of broad coverage say that this is the real world today and it would be folly to ignore the fact that noncollegiate institutions are in the business of continuing education to stay. Their diploma and "credit" programs are sanctioned for federal student aid and the institutions are eligible for many federal grants and contracts if their accrediting associations are recognized by the Office of Education. Many of the important clientele groups of institutions of higher education are insisting that all high quality programs be included under the CEU concept whoever produces them.

There are three alternative actions for NUEA:

a) Should the association become an accrediting group for noncredit continuing education for all producer institutions whether collegiate or not?

b) Should the association become an accrediting agency just for collegiate institutions, in which case a secondary question arises - should it accredit both credit and noncredit programs?

c) Should the association not become involved in accrediting either credit or noncredit continuing education activities? If the answer is no, the secondary question of who should accredit continuing education activities emerges. Should it be regional accrediting associations as part of their basic standards for overall institutional accreditation? or some other organization or association? or some newly created organization which would satisfy the requirements of the current situation?

While the answers are not simple, it appears to be evident that some type of instrument will be used or created to deal with the growing acceptance of the CEU nationally and the imperative that some positive action be taken to deal with the problems of uniformity of application and controls on program quality. Noncredit programs are far more fraught with prospects of shoddy or fraudulent activities than credit and degree programs have ever been.

3. Financing

The national implementation of the CEU will most probably take place in four stages: a) acceptance by other regional accrediting associations (following the lead

of the Southern Association); b) distribution of national guidelines for all producer institutions, collegiate and noncollegiate; c) establishment of an accrediting association for all noncredit continuing education activities using the CEU concept; d) establishment of a national records center for all CEUs awarded.

Each of these steps involves not only organizational problems but also financing requirements. The financing of regional accrediting activities is of course the responsibility of regional accrediting associations and will be handled internally by those organizations.

The national guidelines are now in process of approval by the National Task Force and the original associations which initiated the CEU effort. Task Force plans are being developed for publication and distribution of the national guidelines by NUEA. The plans include a proposal for advance commitments by participating organizations for purchases of sufficient copies of the guidelines to cover the printing cost. Additional income from sale of the guidelines would be used to cover legal and administrative expenses during the preliminary stages for establishment of the accrediting association.

Activities of the accrediting association would be self-financing either through membership dues or user charges. The national records center would be financed either by membership or user charges. Development costs of the center would have to be borne by the accrediting association or some governmental or foundation grant.

Conclusion

Forces are in motion which will inexorably result in the national implementation of the CEU within the next 12 to 24 months. The basic questions are:

1. Will there be a uniform use of the CEU or will each institution apply it in accordance with its own guidelines and criteria?
2. Assuming the national acceptance and utilization of the CEU in collegiate institutions through regional accrediting associations, will noncollegiate educational producers be able to apply the CEU in the same way as collegiate or will they find it necessary to set up a separate CEU system?
3. Assuming a national CEU implementation among collegiate and noncollegiate institutions, how are quality controls to be organized and institutionalized?
4. How are any or all of these activities to be financed?

NUEA and its member will have a central role in providing solutions to these questions.